DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 285 639 PS 016 448

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TITLE Paternity Leave: Current Status and Future Prospects. Working Paper No. 157.
INSTITUTION Wellesley Coll., Mass. Center for Research on Women.
SPONS AGENCY Ford Foundation, New York, N.Y.; Ittleston Foundation Inc., New York, NY.; Levi Strauss Foundation, Inc., San Francisco, Calif.; Rockefeller Family Fund, Inc., New York, N.Y.
PUB DATE 85
NOTE 22p.
AVAILABLE FROM Center for Research on Women, Wellesley College, Wellesley, MA 02181 ($3.00).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Employed Parents; *Fathers; Foreign Countries; *Fringe Benefits; Futures (of Society); Mothers; Parent Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS *Parental Leave; Sweden; United States

ABSTRACT

This paper examines current patterns and trends in the availability and use of parental leave by U.S. fathers. Introductory material focuses on legal and administrative contexts of parental leave and parental leave policies available to employed mothers. The main discussion uses U.S. and Swedish data to explore (1) long-term paid leave at the time of birth; (2) short-term paid leave at the time of birth; (3) unpaid leave at the time of birth; and (4) other types of leave. The available data indicate that long-term paid birth leave is rarely available to U.S. fathers, and rarely used when available. Short-term paid leave is available to fathers, primarily through use of sick days, in at least a quarter of large firms; no data exist concerning what proportion of fathers use it. Long-term unpaid leave is available to fathers in about one-third of large firms, and frequently in public employment; fathers' use of it is low. No formal data indicate the prevalence or use of paternal leave for fathers of older children. Concluding remarks concern the effects of paternal leave, about which formal research tells little, and future prospects for the implementation of parental leave programs for fathers by employers and employed fathers' use of parental leave. (RH)

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Material in this paper is drawn from Joseph H. Pleck, "Employment and Fatherhood," in Michael E. Lamb (ed.), The Father's Role: Applied Perspectives (New York: Wiley-Interscience, in press). Helpful comments on earlier drafts of this material were provided by James Levine, Michael Lamb, Dana Friedman, Sheila Kamerman, and Stanley Nollen.

Only a few years ago, "paternity leave" was largely a rhetorical demand, advanced by a small group of fatherhood activists. Today, some forms of parental leave are actually available to U. S. fathers to a significant degree. Further, as part of a broader campaign to upgrade parental leave in general, both the federal government and individual states are considering mandating employers to provide at least some form of paternal leave, and mainstream unions are advocating the wider extension of all forms of paternal leave. Policy analysts are explicitly including fathers in more general discussions of parental leave (Kamerman et al., 1983; Zigler and Muenchow, 1983; Catalyst, 1981, 1983, 1985). As Kamerman (1985) put it: "parental leave is a children's issue, a family issue, a women's issue, and a social issue--but it is also a men's issue."

The term "paternity leave" has already acquired strong connotations, both positive and negative. To some, it is the key to future change in sex roles and highly desirable; to others, it is frivolous and irrelevant. Although paternity leave is the popular term, "parental leave for fathers" is perhaps preferable because it does not yet have such mixed associations. Also, the conceptual rubric under which U.S. policies do now, or in the future will, give fathers the right to take leave is as part of a policy for child care leave for both parents, not a leave specifically targeted to fathers.

Legal and Administrative Context

A basic distinction needs to be made at the outset. Parental leave can be conceptually divided into two components: leave for the temporary medical disability associated with

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pregnancy and birth (as part of a more general policy for temporary medical disability), and leave for purposes of child care. Only women are theoretically eligible for that part of parental leave which is conceptualized as temporary medical disability (although men will have claims for other kinds of temporary medical disabilities). But both sexes are theoretically eligible for that part of parental leave which is conceptualized as for purposes of child care.

In Kamerman et al.'s (1983) analysis, legal policies concerning parental leave in the U.S. have focused primarily on the disability aspect of leave, and been rooted primarily in laws regarding sex discrimination in employment. The basic law concerning this discrimination is Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, amended in 1972 and 1978. In 1966, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) ruled that an employer could exclude maternity from medical disability insurance coverage without violating the law against sex discrimination. In 1972, the EEOC reversed itself. But in 1976, the Supreme Court held in Gilbert vs. General Electric that the exclusion of pregnancy-related disabilities from disability insurance programs did not constitute sex discrimination.

In response to the uproar about this decision, Congress passed the Pregnancy Disability Act of 1978 (technically an amendment to Title VII), which required pregnancy to be covered if other medical disabilities were covered (Kamerman et al., 1983). The law did not mandate disability coverage where it did not presently exist, but only that pregnancy disability

not be differentially treated. In March, 1985, in California Federal Savings vs. Guerra (the "Garland" case), a federal court struck down on grounds of sex discrimination a California statute requiring employers to provide an unpaid pregnancy disability leave with the guarantee of return to the same or comparable job; California law did not specify a similar job guarantee at the end of unpaid leaves for other types of temporary medical disabilities. At this writing, the case is under appellate review.

Some might object to describing the situation of new mothers as a temporary medical disability, on the grounds that this classification reinforces our society's overly medicalized perception of birth and views women's parenting in only biological terms. There is perhaps some merit in this concern. At the same time, however, it is clear that the only legal or administrative grounds under which many women currently receive parental leave benefits is through considering the time surrounding birth as a period of temporary medical disability. Further, if one is pragmatically interested in increasing the percentage of employed mothers who receive any parental leave benefit, it may be politically more feasible to do so by extending disability leave than by advancing the claim that women and men have the right to take a leave from work solely by virtue of being parents.

To many people, the only frame of reference for parental leave is medical disability leave for mothers. Because they do not understand or accept the concept of child care leave, they are unable to respond to a request from a father for "paternity

leave." An extreme example is an employer quoted in the press about his first such employee: "Gynecology is not my field....I don't know if this man has had a sex change operation or what."

Current advocacy efforts for the improvement of parental leave policies can be classified as concerning disability leave, child care leave, or both. Policy initiatives concerning either child care leave only, or both disability and child care leave, are directly relevant to men as fathers. An example of an initiative focusing only on child care leave is a bill considered in the Massachusetts legislature in 1985 (H. 3121) mandating employers to offer up to 16 weeks of unpaid child care leave to parents of both sexes.

An initiative which targets both kinds of leaves is the Parental and Disability Leave Act of 1985 (H.R. 2020), developed and introduced by the Congressional Women's Caucus. This statute mandates employers to offer all employees 26 weeks of unpaid disability leave (this explicitly includes pregnancy; however, pregnancy-related temporary disability is usually medically certified for a maximum of 8 weeks), and 16 weeks of unpaid parental leave. Both leaves are job-guaranteed. If passed, such bills would in effect mandate employers to offer unpaid paternity leaves to fathers.

Comparative Data on Parental Leave for Mothers

Before examining current patterns and trends in the availability and utilization of parental leave by fathers, it is useful to examine the parental leave policies available to employed mothers. Kamerman et al. (1983) conducted an employer

survey, and located other survey data, in order to describe the adequacy of employed women's parental leave benefits in terms of three criteria: (1) insurance: health insurance for the medical costs of the delivery for the mother, (2) job-protection: the right to take a leave of absence from the job, with the right to return to the same or a comparable job at the end of the leave, and with the maintenance of benefits and seniority, and (3) wage replacement: receiving the equivalent of full or partial salary while on the job-protected leave. The first of these applies only to disability leave, but the issue of job protection and wage replacement theoretically apply to both forms of leave.

Of the 250 firms responding to Kamerman et al.'s (1983) survey of 1000 companies with a net worth of at least $500,000, 95% stated they provided health insurance benefits to their female employees, though only 84% offered full coverage. The rate of this benefit was lower in the smaller firms in the sample, and women are far more likely than men to work in smaller firms. The 1977 Quality of Employment Survey (Quinn and Staines, 1979) found that 75% of married women employed 20 or more hours a week (the minimum employment necessary to be included in the survey) had some kind of employer-sponsored health insurance. Both the extent to which this insurance included maternity benefits, and the coverage available through husbands' medical insurance, are not known. Kamerman et al. estimate that 10% of all employed women in the child-bearing years lack any insurance coverage from any source.

Of the married women in the 1977 Quality of Employment Survey, 75% said they were entitled to some job-protected leave,

a 12 percent increase since 1969. A Conference Board survey of large employers in 1978 found higher rates of such leave, but large firms are more likely to have better job leave policies, so that these findings overestimate their prevalence. Kamerman et al.'s survey found that 88% of employers provided this leave, but only 72% stated that they formally guarantee employees on maternity leave the same or a comparable job and assure them protection of seniority. Kamerman et al. (1983) believe there is an informal job-guarantee policy in the other firms providing a leave. A leave of two or three months is the most common policy; three months or less is the rule in 61% of the firms. There was also variation in the length of prior employment required to be eligible, and the extent to which benefit coverage is maintained by the employer during the leave. Most companies with a leave policy instituted it in the 1970's. The right to a job-protected leave at the time of childbirth has been largely but far from universally won by by female workers.

Twenty-nine percent of the Quality of Employment Survey's female respondents in 1977 stated they were eligible for a maternity leave with pay, twice the proportion eligible in 1969. Like the other components of maternity policies, the availability of paid leave varies considerably. In the Quality of Employment Survey, nearly half of the employees in firms with 500 or more employees have this benefit, compared with less than 10% in firms with fewer than 10 employees. In Kamerman et al.'s survey, disability insurance (i.e., replacement of lost income during disability, not payment of medical costs) is available in

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somewhat less than half of large firms, and under prevailing conventions, provides 6 weeks of insurance payments. Five states (New York, New Jersey, Rhode Island, California, and Hawaii) mandate employers to provide temporary disability insurance (TDI) to employees, explicitly including pregnancy; these programs are funded through a small payroll tax, usually contributed by employees. Thus, except in these five states, only a minority of employed women--generally those in large companies--are entitled to paid maternity leave.

Types of Parental Leave for Fathers

Parental leave for fathers can take several different forms. Its major categories are: (1) long term, paid, (2) short term, paid, (3) long term, unpaid, and (4) other. The following discussion summarizes current data, from the U.S. and Sweden, on the availability and utilization of each form of paternal leave.

1. Long term paid leave at the time of birth. When the term "paternity leave" is mentioned, the image usually evoked is long term, paid, birth leave. When a length of time is specified, it is often six months. A tiny handful of organizations offer a substantial paid parental leave for which fathers are eligible, such as the Ford Foundation and Bank Street College. The Bank Street College of Education's Family (Maternity/Paternity) Leave Policy offers three full months of paid coverage. Both biological and adoptive parents are eligible, and for the latter, the child may be up to 36 months of age.

The Ford Foundation provides a paid "child care leave" of 8 weeks, and an additional unpaid leave of 18 weeks, totalling 26 weeks in all. The policy applies to adoptive parents up to age

5, and the leave may begin up to four weeks before the expected birth or date of adoption. It must be taken within the first six months that the employee becomes a parent; the paid and unpaid portions of the leave do not have to be taken consecutively, however. Employees taking this leave (including the unpaid portion) are guaranteed a comparable position when they return, and the same job if at all possible. All benefits continue during the paid leave; during the unpaid part, all benefits except contribution to retirement and saving plans, and the accumulation of sick and vacation days continue. If both parents work for the Ford Foundation, they receive the equivalent of one leave between them, but they can split it any way they wish. Although no systematic data are available, the number of fathers in either of these organizations who use the leave is quite low.

Sweden's Parental Insurance Plan gives fathers the same rights to parental leave as mothers (for detailed analysis, see Lamb and Levine, 1983). In addition, Finland and Norway also give the father some right to a portion of the overall parental leave, and several other European countries are debating the extension of parental leave to include fathers. Sweden's policies provide for several different categories of leave.

The basic leave provided ("parental leave in connection with the birth of a child") is a six-month leave available during the first nine months after the birth, which parents can divide between themselves. In 1978, about 10% of eligible fathers took one day or more of leave, and 5% took one month or more. The average number of days used by fathers taking a leave was 42.

Among fathers in couples in which both spouses are employed fulltime, 14% took one day or more. Although utilization rates have increased since the policy was first introduced in 1974, they now appear to have stabilized at the current level (Lamb and Levine, 1983; Lamb, 1982; Erler et al. 1982; Erler, 1982). Figures for 1983 (Statens Offentliga Utredninger, 1984) show about the same levels as 1978.

There are two possible explanations for this relatively low level of utilization: simple lack of interest by fathers in taking parental leave, or a variety of more social factors. It is no doubt likely that many Swedish fathers would not take a parental leave under any circumstances. But there are other fathers whose utilization may be significantly affected by a variety of structural barriers. The first and most obvious is employers' attitudes toward fathers who take parental leaves. Hwang (1982), in a survey of 50 fathers who took one month or more of parental leave in 1980, and a survey of a small sample of employers, both in Goteborg, Sweden, a substantial proportion of both fathers and employers reported that employers do in fact view leave-taking fathers negatively and may penalize them in various ways. This result occurred in spite of explicit legal prohibitions of negative sanctions by employers against fathers who take leaves.

In addition, fathers' utilization of the basic leave seems to be directly influenced by economic factors. For example, fathers employed in the private sector receive 90% of their regular salary while on leave, up to a set maximum level. Fathers with higher salaries give up more if they take a leave,

perhaps explaining why they are somewhat less likely to take leaves. Fathers in public sector jobs receive 100% of their salary, with no maximum, and thus give up less when taking a leave than private sector fathers. Correspondingly, fathers in the public sector take leaves somewhat more often (Lamb and Levine, 1983; Kamerman, 1980). Further, the higher the mother's earnings, the more likely is the father to take at least some leave (Kamerman, 1980). Families have more to lose economically if a high-earning parent of either sex, in the private sector, takes a leave.

Another important but often overlooked aspect of the leave policy itself also needs to be considered. Sweden's basic leave policy is unquestionably the most generous to fathers of any in the world. At the same time, it has an important limit: if both parents are employed, they must divide a fixed amount of leave between them. (This is also a feature of most U.S. leave policies when husband and wife have the same employer.) In this context, when a father does not take any paid leave time, it is not clear to what extent this represents the father's desire to take no leave, the mother's desire to take all six months, or both. Hwang's (1982) survey of Swedish fathers who took parental leave found a few who had not wanted it themselves, but took one because their wives felt they could not leave their jobs for some or all of the leave to which they were entitled. While the father's own motivations are undoubtedly the strongest determinant of whether he will take a parental leave, other social factors contribute as well.

2. Short-term paid leave at the time of birth. The second major category of parental leave used by fathers is short term, paid leave. Two of the 250 firms in Kamerman et al.'s (1983) survey provide several paid leave days explicitly designated for fathers for purposes of parenting. However, about a quarter of the firms reported they permitted fathers to take a few days off with pay at the time of the birth of a child by using other paid leave, usually sick leave. Three or four days appears to be an upper limit. The proportion of firms in which father are actually able to use sick days for this purpose is probably somewhat higher. There appear to be no data on the extent to which fathers take advantage of these policies.

If one assumes that most workers have relative freedom to take sick days at will, the ability to use sick days for parental leave may seem a trivial matter. However, many workers are required to provide medical certification when they claim paid sick days. Some unions report that companies discourage workers from using their full entitlement of paid sick days. Thus, even when sick days are formally available, there may be disincentives to their use for parenting purposes.

The real frontier of paid parental leave for fathers is not six month paid leave, but rather the right to use sick days for paternity child care, or the right to a small number of paid leave days explicitly designated for use by fathers. One Northeastern industrial union local, for example, negotiated for a single day off with pay for fathers on the day of the birth (Dudzic, 1983). After prolonged struggle, the company agreed,

but only with the stipulation that the birth had to occur during the worker's actual shift on that day!

Swedish parental leave policies provide, in addition to the better-known long term paid leave discussed earlier, a short term paid leave for fathers. Under a provision of the "parental allowance for the temporary care of children," fathers are eligible to take 10 days of paid leave at the time of the birth of a second or subsequent child, when the mother is presumably unable to care for any prior children. In 1976, 64% of the eligible fathers used this benefit, for an average of 7.5 days; 40% of those eligible took all 10 days (Kamerman, 1980, p. 44). Thus, Swedish fathers' take advantage of this short term leave far more frequently than the long term leave.

Some might object that a leave as short as a few days is too brief to make much difference. Certainly, whatever it is that a paternity leave provides for the father, child, or family, a longer leave does more of it than a shorter one does. However, even leaves as limited as three or four days may be worthwhile to reduce stress in the new mother and family at a critical point, and to facilitate later father involvement.

3. Unpaid leave at the time of birth. The typical case reported in the media of a father fighting for paternity leave is a father in an organization in which women are routinely granted unpaid leaves, but he has been denied one (and he was the first father ever to ask). This form of leave is becoming common in union contracts for state and municipal employees, including teachers. In the Catalyst (1985) survey of 384 companies responding to a

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mailing to the Fortune 1000 largest industrial and 500 largest financial and service companies, about a third (119 companies) said they offered unpaid leave to fathers; 35% of these leaves could be four months or longer. However, only 12 (about 10%) of these companies reported that a father had ever actually taken a leave.

Clearly, because of the income loss for the family, only a minority of fathers will take an unpaid leave for any significant duration. Media accounts of fathers struggling to receive unpaid parental leaves suggest that among those fathers who do want them, the desire for them is very strong. In addition to wanting to be actively involved with the newborn, other reasons include the mother being unable to take a leave from her job, or the mother having postnatal medical complications.

4. Other leave. Two other innovative patterns of paternity leave are beginning to appear that are not specifically birth-related: reduced work time (the right to work part time for a defined period of time when the worker's children are young), and personal or child care days (the right to take a defined number of days off from work when a child needs care). These policies are available to fathers in only a few U.S. firms.

Both are available to all fathers in Sweden. Like the 10-day birth leave discussed immediately above, these components of Swedish leave policy are far less well known than that country's long term paid leave designated for birth. First, Sweden provides a "special parental leave" of 12 weeks to each parent, which can be taken any time during the first 8 years, and used in

a variety of ways (taken all at once, used to reduce the parent's workday from 8 to 6 hours over a longer period, assigned to the other parent). Although fathers use smaller amounts of it than do mothers, about one-third of fathers use at least some of this leave (Erler et al., 1982). Fathers' utilization of this special leave is higher than the basic leave, even though it is reimbursed at a lower rate than the latter (Erler et al., 1982; Lamb and Levine, 1983).

Sweden also provides 60 days per year of paid leave to the parents combined to take care of sick child, or to take care of children when the regular caretaker is unable to do so, until the child is 8 years old ("parental allowance for the temporary care of children"). About 40% of fathers take at least some of this leave, though they use less than 40% of all the days taken (Hwang, 1982). (The ten day leave available to fathers at the time of the birth of a second or later child, discussed in the preceding section, is a special benefit under this program.)

To summarize the availability and utilization of these four types of paternal leave in the U.S. on the basis of the limited extant data, long term paid birth leave is only rarely available to fathers, and rarely used when it is available. Short term paid leave is available to fathers, primarily through use of sick days, in at least a quarter of large firms; no data exist concerning what proportion of fathers use it. Long term unpaid leave is available to fathers in about one-third of large firms, and frequently in public employment; fathers' utilization is low. No formal data indicate the prevalence or utilization of paternal leave for fathers of older children.

Effects of Paternal Leave

Little is known from formal research about the consequences of fathers' taking parental leave. Investigation of the effects of parental leave is limited to two studies. In Hwang's (1982) survey of 50 Goteborg fathers who took a month or more of paid parental leave in 1980, most men were positive when asked to give an overall assessment of their parental leave experience. About 30% described it as a wonderful experience, a time of personal growth in which they were able to observe the child's development closely and consolidate a close relationship with the child. Another 40% felt that the experience was mostly positive, although their reasons for taking leave were not so much because they valued the experience intrinsically, but because they believed in equal parental responsibilities and opportunities.

The remaining 30% were more negative. Twenty-five percent felt that it was a difficult time for them, although they still felt that men should take some parental leave. The major positive element reported was the break from work. Five percent described the period at home as very strenuous, and something they would never do again. Many of those with negative reactions had taken parental leave because their wives' employment situation made it imperative, rather than because they wanted to do so themselves.

Lamb et al. (1982) compared 17 fathers taking leave of one month or more in Goteborg, Sweden, with 35 fathers who did not. For those 17, the average amount of time away from work was about three months, usually starting when the infant was 5 or 6 months

old. The leave-taking fathers were in fact the primary caretakers while on leave. This study examined the hypothesis that fathers who are primary caretakers (while on leave) would show more of certain interactive styles with their infants typical of mothers (smiling, talking, kissing, hugging, touching). Significant differences remained between mothers' and fathers' behaviors. The samples in these two studies are small, and there is no evidence on the topic of perhaps most interest: on the long run effects of leave on fathers' degree of involvement.

Overview and Future Prospects

The length, compensation, and timing of parental leave appear to make a considerable difference in fathers' degree of utilization. In the Swedish data, short term leaves are used more frequently than long term ones. Taking a few days of sick leave at a time may be less disruptive to a father's job than taking a longer leave at the time of birth. Lamb (1982) suggests that higher proportions of fathers may take advantage of Sweden's short term leave policies than of the long term leave policy because the child is older and has been weaned.

An important reason, perhaps the major reason, for fathers' low utilization rate is their lack of motivation and their feeling that it is inappropriate for them. But among those potentially interested in taking a parental leave, there are other important barriers as well. At childbirth, probably only a small minority of even motivated fathers take leaves longer than a few days or weeks, whether paid or unpaid. When the leave is unpaid and longer than a few days, fathers' rate of utilization is low

largely because of the economic cost. Even when the leave is paid, utilization is low for long-term leave because of its potential negative career consequences, and because some leaves are structured so that the father's taking some leave time reduces the amount of leave available to the mother.

At the same time, there is evidence that higher proportions of fathers will take advantage of leave policies that are explicitly short-term or limited in other ways, particularly if employees have considerable flexibility as to how to schedule the leave time. One reason more fathers use short-term leaves is that they are less disruptive than a long-term leave to the father's job prospects or career track, a disincentive to taking a leave even when loss of income is not an issue. Clearly, the duration, timing, financial implications, and context of parental leave make a big difference in whether fathers will use it.

Long-term paid paternity leave is extremely unlikely to be accepted by U.S. employers on a wide scale. In Sweden and in the few U.S. firms in which long-term paid leaves are available, fathers utilize them at low rates, undermining the support for this kind of leave. Simultaneously, this form of leave appears expensive to employers. The three other more limited kinds of paternity leave, however, should and realistically can be extended. Their cost is far smaller and the demand for them, as shown by rates of utilization, is far higher. The "packaging" of a leave affects the proportion of fathers likely to use it, and how realistic it is that employers can be persuaded to offer it.

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